DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 221 269 PS 013 029

AUTHOR Smith, Gregory J.
TITLE Gender and Attractiveness Related to Preschool Peer Interactions.
PUB DATE May 82
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association (Minneapolis, MN, May 6-8, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adults; Aggression; *Interpersonal Attraction; Peer Acceptance; Peer Evaluation; *Peer Relationship; Photographs; *Preschool Children; Preschool Education; Prosocial Behavior; *Sex Bias
IDENTIFIERS *Facial Features

ABSTRACT

Dion, Berscheid, and Walster (1972) coined the phrase "what is beautiful is good" to describe an apparent stereotype in which attractive individuals are viewed more positively than less attractive individuals on a number of characteristics. The present study was an attempt to understand the ramifications of the "beauty-is-good" stereotype in young children. Specifically, the present research investigated the relationship between attractiveness and preschool social interaction. Forty-two children (23 boys and 19 girls), ranging in age from 33 to 68 months, were observed during free-play for a 5-minute period on 5 separate days, and behavior initiated by and directed toward each child was recorded. Two major categories of behavior were observed: aggressive and prosocial. After the behavioral observations were made, facial photographs of the children were taken. Four of these pictures were placed in front of each child, who was asked to choose the most attractive one. That picture was removed, and the child was asked to choose the most attractive one remaining. This procedure was repeated until all the photographs were rated by each child. Results indicated that attractiveness has a different effect on boys than on girls; while attractive girls received the greatest number of prosocial behaviors directed towards them by their peers, no differential treatment of boys related to attractiveness was found. (MP)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED221269

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

Gender and Attractiveness Related to Preschool Peer Interactions

Gregory J. Smith

Dickinson College

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Gregory J. Smith

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Paper presented at the Midwestern Psychological Association Annual Meeting, Minneapolis, Minnesota, May, 1982.

PS 013029

Abstract

Ramifications of the "beauty-is-good" stereotype were investigated in preschool children. Attractiveness ratings of 42 preschoolers were assessed in relationship to aggressive and prosocial behaviors initiated and received. Attractive girls were treated more positively than unattractive girls. There was no differential treatment of boys related to attractiveness.

Gender and Attractiveness Related to Preschool Peer Interactions

Dion, Berscheid, and Walster (1972) coined the phrase "what is beautiful is good" to describe an apparent stereotype in which attractive individuals are viewed more positively than less attractive individuals on a number of characteristics. The present study was an attempt to understand the ramifications of the "beauty-is-good" stereotype in young children. Specifically, the present research investigated the relationship between attractiveness and preschool social interactions.

The present investigation was undertaken to determine if observed behaviors would replicate what has been learned in the laboratory about perceptions and expectations of children who differ in their degree of attractiveness. In one study, conducted by Clifford and Walster (1973), 404 fifth grade teachers were shown a child's report card with a photograph of a child attached. The report card was identical in all cases. The photographed attached to the report card varied, in some cases it was of an attractive child, in others it was of an unattractive child. The attractive child was rated by the teachers as having a higher educational potential; a higher IQ; a greater likelyhood of obtaining a higher education; as being more likely to have parents interested in academic achievement; and as having better peer relations. Other studies that have had teachers, parents, and college students rate

unfamiliar children have shown similar biases existing in favor of attractive children.

Children themselves appear to have internalized this "beauty-is-good: stereotype. When rated by other children, attractive children are more likely to be chosen as potential friends (Dion, 1973); expected to behave more prosocially (Dion & Berscheid, 1974); are perceived to be smarter (Langlois & Stephan, 1977); and are judged to be more self-sufficient and independent (Dion & Berscheid, 1974) than there less attractive counterparts.

The present investigation was undertaken to determine if these perceptions and expectations are translated by preschoolers into differential treatment of peers based on attractiveness. It was hypothesized that attractive children would be treated better by their peers than less attractive children.

Method

Forty-two children (23 boys and 19 girls), ranging in age from 33 to 68 months ($\bar{X}$ = 50 months), were observed in a preschool they regularly attended. Direct observation of each child's behavior was performed from within the classroom by trained observers. Each child was observed during free-play for a five-minute period on five separate days. Behavior initiated by and directed toward each child was rated according to a modification of a scale used by Abramovitch, Corter, and Lando (1979). Two major categories of behavior

were observed: aggressive and prosocial behaviors. Aggression was subdivided into acts of physical aggression (hitting, pushing, shoving, kicking, biting, pulling hair, etc.), verbal aggression, and a category labeled object struggle (or a fight over an object). Prosocial behaviors were subdivided into giving and sharing an object, helping another child either physically or verbally, physical affection (hugs, kisses, holding hands, etc.), and prosocial verbal comments.

After the behavioral observations were made, the children's pictures were taken and these photographs were rated for attractiveness. Because facial attractiveness is perhaps tha most saliant and readily noticeable aspect of appearnance, facial photographs were used for the attractiveness ratings. So that clothing cues would not bias rater's perceptions of attractiveness, most clothing was covered by a standard cloth.

The photographs of the 42 children were presented via slides to college students who rated them on a nine-point scale of attractiveness. One equalled the least attractive child ever seen, five a child of average attractiveness, and nine the most attractive child ever seen. This yielded an average attractiveness rating for each child.

The photographs were also rated by preschool-age children. These children rated the photographs by playing a game. Four pictures were placed in front of the child and they were asked to choose the most attractive child. That picture was removed and the child was asked to

choose the most attractive child remaining. Once all pictures had been removed a new set of four pictures was presented. In this fashion preschooler ratings of attractiveness were obtained.

Results

Using a Pearson correlation coefficient adult and preschooler ratings of attractiveness were found to be positively correlated, r (41) = .46, $p < .001$. Because of this correspondence and the fact that all of the following results come out similarly using adult or preschool ratings, all analyses reported below are based on adult ratings of attractiveness.

Attractiveness had a different effect on boys than on girls. In girls there was a positive correlation between attractiveness and the number of prosocial behaviors received by each girl, r (18) = .60, $p < .01$. In other words, attractive girls received the greatest number of prosocial behaviors directed towards them by their peers, while less attractive girls received fewer prosocial behaviors. Dividing the girls into three groups, low, moderate, and high in attractiveness, a Oneway ANOVA approaches significance, F (2,16) = 3.544, p = .053, (see Figure 1 for group means). In boys, however, there is a lack of effect of attractiveness on prosocial behavior received (r = -.03). Figure 2 shows group means for boys.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Insert Figure 2 about here

Turning to aggressive behaviors, again there is a differential effect dur to gender. Attractiveness is negatively correlated with aggression received in girls, r (18) = -.41, $p < .05$, but not significantly correlated in boys (r = .28). In other words, in girls but not in boys, children who are lower in attractiveness receive more aggression from their peers than children higher in attractiveness. Again a Oneway ANOVA approaches significance for girls, F (2,16) = 3.207, p = .066, (see Figure 3), but does not approach significance for boys (see Figure 4).

Insert Figure 3 about here

Insert Figure 4 about here

Discussion

The fact that gender differences were found with the present sample of preschoolers is interesting in light of Bar-Tal and Saxe's (1976) review of the adult literature which concluded that the "beauty-is-good" stereotype may be more stringently applied to females than males

in our society. For example, Krebs and Adinolfi (1975) found a positive relationship between the number of dates a college student went on and attractiveness existed only in females. Byrne, London, and Reeves (1968) found that attractive females were rated as more intelligent and moral than unattractive females. But, in males, the attractive were seen as less intelligent and moral.

It appears that children as young as preschool-age have internalized the adult cultural standards related to attractiveness, including the differential application of this stereotype based on gender. Specifically, preschoolers tend to treat attractive girls more positively than unattractive girls, while showing no differential treatment of boys related to attractiveness.

Abramovitch, R., Corter, C., & Lando, B. Sibling interaction in the home. Child Development, 1979, 50, 997-1003.

Bar-Tal, D., & Saxe, L. Physical attractiveness and its relationship to sex-role stereotyping. Sex Roles: A Journal of Research, 1976, 2, 123-133.

Byrne, D., London,G., & Reeves, K. The effects of physical attractiveness, sex, and attitude similarity on interpersonal attraction. Journal of Personality, 1968, 36, 259-271.

Clifford, M., & Walster, E. The effecte of physical attractiveness on teacher expectations. Sociology of Education, 1973, 46, 248-258.

Dion, K. K. Young children's stereotyping of facial attractiveness. Developmental Psychology, 1973, 9, 183-188.

Dion, K. K., & Berscheid, E. Physical attractiveness and peer perception among children. Sociometry, 1974, 37, 1-12.

Dion, K. K., Berscheid, E., & Walster, E. What is beautiful is good. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1972, 24, 285-290.

Krebs, D., & Adinolfi, A. A. Physical attractiveness, social relations, and personality style. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1975, 31, 245-253.

Langlois, J. H., & Stephan, C. S. The effects of physical attractiveness and ethnicity on children's behavioral attributions and peer preferences. Child Development, 1977, 48, 1694-1698.

Figure 1

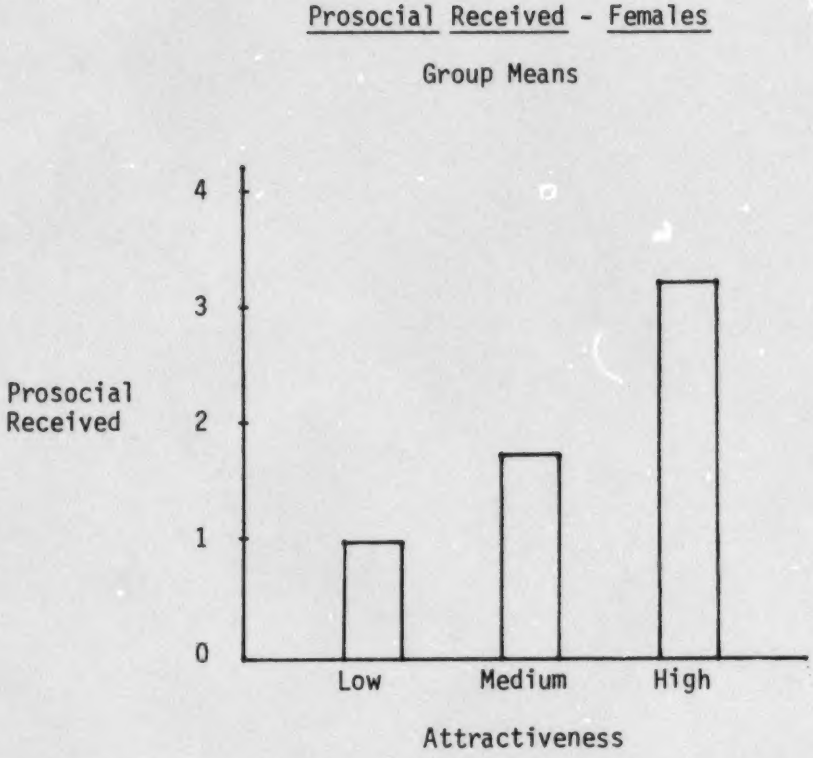

Prosocial Received - Females
Group Means
Prosocial Received
4
3
2
1
0
Low
Medium
High
Attractiveness

Figure 2

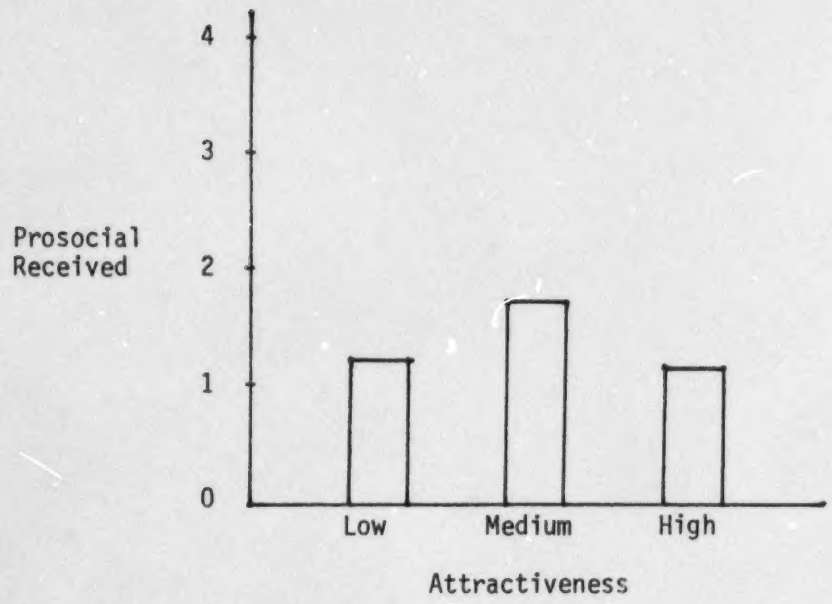

Prosocial Received - Males
Group Means
Prosocial Received
4
3
2
1
0
Low
Medium
High
Attractiveness

Figure 3

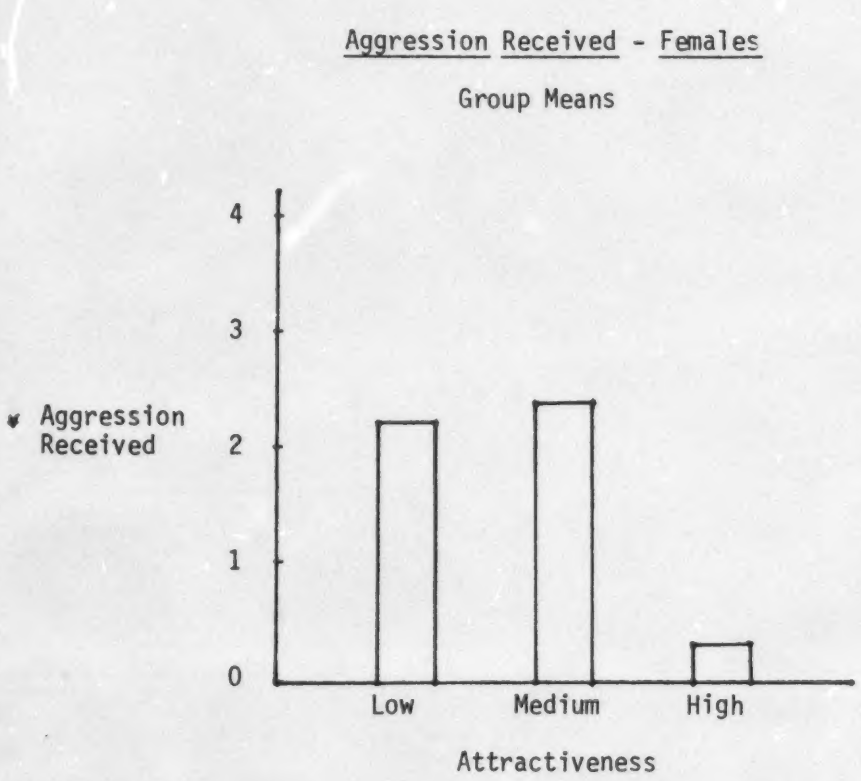
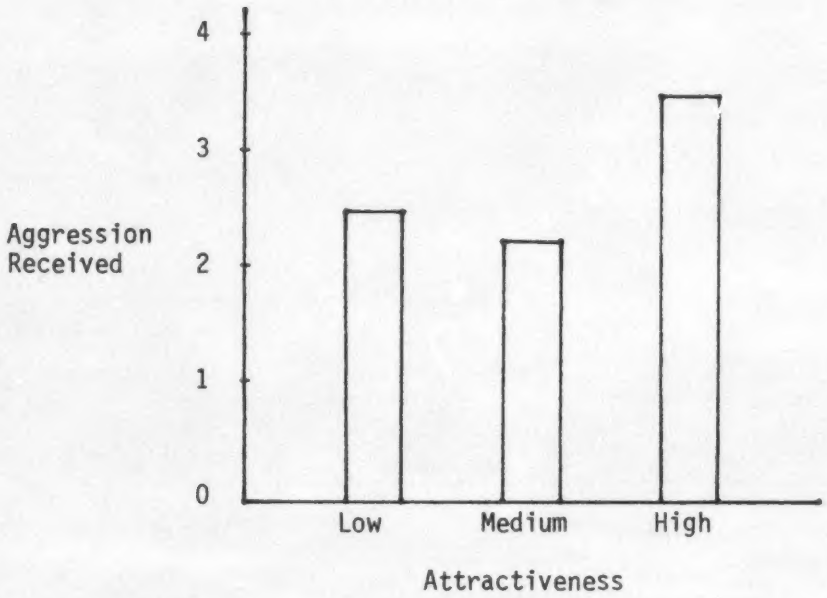

Aggression Received - Females
Group Means
Aggression Received
4
3
2
1
0
Low
Medium
High
Attractiveness

Figure 4


Aggression Received - Males
Group Means
Aggression Received
4
3
2
1
0
Low
Medium
High
Attractiveness